



"Woman of outer darkness, fiend of death,
From what inhuman cave, what dire abyss,
Hast thou invisible that spell o'erheard?
What potent hand hath touched thy quickened corse,
What song dissolved thy cerements, who unclosed
Those faded eyes and filled them from the stars?"

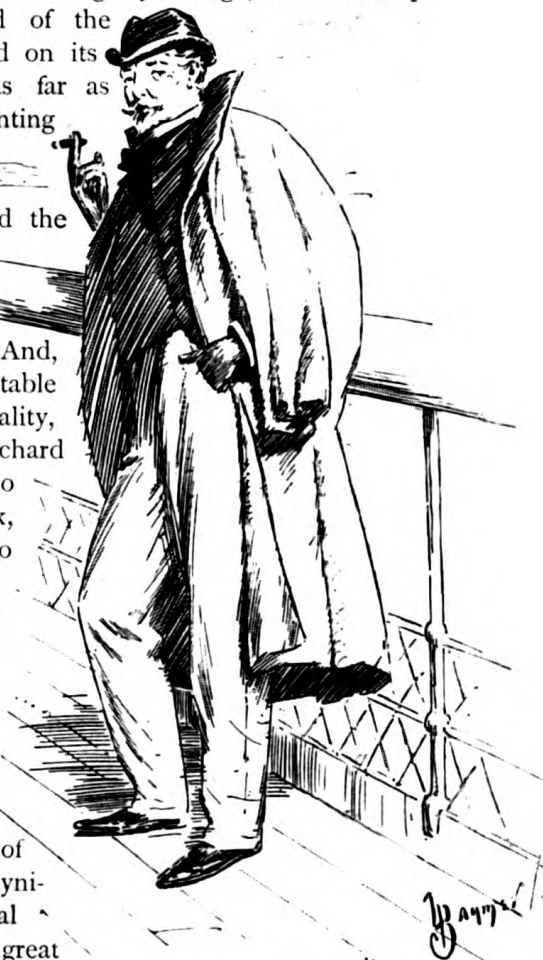
LANDOR: *Gebir*.

CHAPTER I.



OWARDS the end of September, about eight years ago, the steamship *Albrecht*, under the command of the popular Captain Pellegrini, had on its voyage down the Danube, as far as Rustchuck, the honour of counting among its passengers a gentleman

to whom not inaptly might have been addressed the somewhat audacious remark made by Charles Buller to a well-known peer, now deceased, "I often think how puzzled your Maker must be to account for your conduct." And, indeed, a more curious jumble of lovable and detestable qualities than went to the making-up of the personality, labelled for formal purposes Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Ulick Verner Rowan, but familiarly known to Society as "Hippy" Rowan, it would, we think, have been difficult to find. Selfish almost to cruelty, and yet capable of acts of generous self-sacrifice to which many a better man could not perhaps have risen; famous for his unnecessary harshness in the numerous wars wherein he had distinguished himself, and yet enjoying the well-merited reputation of being the best-natured man in London, Hippy Rowan, thanks to the calm and healthy spirit of philosophy within him, had in the course of his fifty odd years of mundane experiences, never allowed a touch of cynicism to chill his heart. It is not so easy or natural as many may imagine to be content with a great deal; but in the golden days when much had been his—at the meridian of his altogether pleasant life, in which even the afternoon shadows were in no wise indicative of the terrors of advancing night—Dick Rowan was possessed of the same serene spirit of



content which distinguished him in the later and more troublous times when he found himself forced to look gout and debt in the face on an income barely double the wages he had formerly given to his *cordon bleu*.

Although, when we present him for the first time to our readers, Colonel Rowan is past fifty, he has been for the last twenty odd years what he himself termed "hopelessly and irretrievably ruined," which meant that he could count on but little over a thousand pounds per annum for his maintenance. In former days he had been far better off and, indeed, for a very short time—a period of about twelve months—was the possessor of a very large sum of money, wealth suddenly inherited, which he had squandered in the most extravagant fashion.

Disraeli used to say, "When I meet a man whose name I cannot remember, I give myself two minutes : then, if it be a hopeless task, I always say, 'And how is the old complaint?'" Now, if the great Tory leader could be imagined by any miracle forgetting the name of his highly-esteemed friend Hippy Rowan, and meeting him and asking him the above searching and comprehensive question, the reply doubtless would have been, "I only got back last week," or "I'm going next month," or something after that fashion ; for certainly Colonel Rowan would have interpreted "the old complaint" to signify his passionate love for Paris, the theatre of his splendid follies, the sepulchre of his fortune indeed, but the Mecca whither his faithful feet were ever eager to speed—the shrine at which his knees, even when gouty, were glad to kneel. The sole surviving representative of one of the most patrician families of Ireland, a man of remarkable personal beauty—his good looks, by the way, in his youth would have been best described by the slang adjective "showy,"—for, ever a man of gigantic stature and herculean build, his bright auburn hair and beard had given him during the earlier part of his career a loud and flaming aspect which rendered him a hopelessly compromising Clavaroche for any Jacqueline to keep clandestine appointments with—as he was reckless and daring to a degree but rarely attained even by his fellow-countrymen, to whom temerity is often ascribed as a national failing. Dick Rowan had certainly distinguished himself in his martial profession ; and the same may be said of that portion of his life passed in the House of Commons, in which august assembly he had for many years helped to represent an Irish county ; but to the twelve months of riotous living in Paris already spoken of, Hippy, beyond all doubt, chiefly owed his fame ; and his laurels, both as warrior and as legislator, paled before the roses which crowned his winecup filled with Yquem of '37, and the myrtles sacred to Venus of which he wove garlands for that goddess by Seine side. But his career in the capital of pleasure, as one of the acknowledged leaders of *la haute nocte*, had been brief though brilliant. Persistently playing the "rubicon" at four louis a point at the Petit Club, while at the same time constantly assuming the onerous responsibilities of an open bank at the Jockey, possess, when unfailing bad luck attends such gallant endeavours to win the smiles of fickle fortune, at least, the advantage not common to all evils of providing in themselves their own



antidote and cure ; and so, at the end of twelve brief months devoted to such pastimes, and others no less costly though less avowable, the gallant colonel had been forced to acknowledge his defeat, and retire with his never-failing grace from the French capital, exchanging indeed with regret *Duglère* for the Speaker, and leaving with a sigh the sparkle of the Grand Seize for the comparative respectability of St. Stephen's.

All this had taken place twenty years and more before the opening of our story, and in the course of this score of years Hippy, by reason of certain prolonged and dangerous rambles undertaken by him for purposes of sport and amusement in all kinds of outlandish countries, had acquired among his friends a not inconsiderable reputation as a traveller ; for though, while his money lasted, he had been quite content to limit his wanderings to explorations in the *pays du tendre*, yet, when forced by unmerciful disaster to fold his pleasure tent and steal away, he had sought to solace his soul for the loss of fortune by "going to and fro in the earth," after the fashion of the prince in whose service indeed that very fortune had been spent—one year suffering himself to be entertained by the Emir of Bokhara, and in the course of the next twelve months accepting the hospitality of the Imaum of Muscat ; becoming acquainted in his rambles, gun and notebook in hand, with all sorts and conditions of men, from sovereign despots, nay, demi-gods, to slaves ranking far below quadrupeds. Nor did he limit his pastimes to sport pure and simple—for this curious being would leave Pall Mall one day to see if Schliemann had forgotten anything in the Trojan plain, or endeavour to catch Beke tripping in Sinai the next ; in all these expeditions being, of course, greatly aided by his rare and precious gift of easily and accurately acquiring all languages and dialects, the choice Arabic with which it amused him to surprise the Shereef of Wazan being no less fluent than the Polish in which he flirted with pretty patriots in the land of Kosciuszco.

But the expedition on which he was bent when we introduce him to our readers was one calling for the lead of neither pencil nor pellet, but a journey of purely social purport. The all too brief days of Hippy's magnificence in Paris had been, so far as they went, concurrent with the reign of splendid folly which has made the name of Djavil Pacha famous in the annals of apolausticism, and some of the most happy hours of Rowan's Parisian existence having been passed in the celebrated apartment on the corner of the Rue Taitbout and the Boulevard des Italiens, inhabited by the Turkish millionaire, between his Excellency and the gallant Colonel a warm feeling of friendship had sprung up—not the mere passing liking, born with the *bisque* and ceasing with the coffee, but a genuine sympathy which lasted when the banquet was all over and the lights put out, which expressed itself in various graceful and cordial shapes after both had retired from Paris, and which, just before our story opens, had taken the form of an invitation from Djavil to his friend to spend a few days with him at his palace on the Bosphorus, a summons which Dick Rowan was now steaming down the Danube to obey.

He had chosen this particularly monotonous and uncomfortable way of reaching his friend for reasons which do not concern us ; but the thought of the unpleasant railway journey from Rustchuck to Varna which awaited him, and then the encounter with the Black Sea, did not tend to assuage the twinges of gout and irritability which assailed him by fits and starts as, during the two dreary days he watched



the shores on either side glide slowly by—seeing on the right Hungary at length give place to Servia, and then Servia to Turkey, while perpetual Wallachia, sad and desolate, stretched unceasingly and for ever to the left—walking up and down the deck leaning on the arm of his trusty valet, or rather, Ancient or Lieutenant, Adams by name, a man almost as well known and fully as well informed as his master, a Cockney who, without any control over the aspirates in his native English, spoke eight other different languages, including Arabic, accurately and fluently, and whose knowledge of Oriental countries dated indeed from the days when he had been page-boy to the great Eltchi in Constantinople. There were but few passengers on board—an abnormally small number, in fact—and to this circumstance, doubtless, was it due that Rowan who, as a rule, paid but little attention to his fellow-travellers, happened to remark a mysterious-looking individual—a man, and apparently not an old one—who sat quite apart from the others and by himself, muffled up to the eyes in a very voluminous, albeit rather dirty, white silk handkerchief, and who was evidently an invalid, judging from the listless way in which he sat, the extreme pallor of the only part of his face which could be seen, and above all, the fever-fed light which glared from between sore and lashless eyelids. He was dressed entirely in black, and although his clothes were somewhat shabby, they betokened carelessness on the part of their wearer rather than poverty; and Adams had noticed and called his master's attention to the fact that on one finger of the man's thin, yellow, dirty hand, which every now and then he would lift to rearrange still higher up about his face the silken muffler, sparkled a diamond, which the omniscient valet recognised to be a stone of value.

"What an extremely disagreeable-looking man, Adams!" pettishly murmured the Colonel in English, as he and his servant in their perambulations up and down the deck for the twentieth time on the first morning of the journey passed by where the mysterious stranger sat. "And how he stares at us! He has the eyes of a lunatic, and there is evidently something horrible the matter with his face. Perhaps he's a leper. Ask the Captain about him."

But the ever-amiable Captain Pellegrini had not much information to impart, save indeed that the man was certainly neither a madman nor a leper, nor indeed, so far as he knew, an invalid. He was a Moldavian, Isaac Lebedenko by name, a young man, a medical student or doctor, the Captain thought; but, at all events, a man in very well-to-do circumstances, for he always spent his money freely.

"I have known him off and on for two years, please your Excellency," said the skipper. "Though I must confess I have never seen his face properly, for he's always muffled up in that way. He takes his meals by himself, and of course pays extra for doing so, and in fact he always, so far as I know, keeps entirely to himself and never speaks to any one. But the steward's boy, who has waited on him and seen his face, says there is nothing the matter with him except indeed that he's the ugliest man he ever saw."

"Perhaps he's consumptive," suggested the Colonel. But the all-wise Adams shook his head. That was quite inadmissible. He had seen the man walk, and had noticed his legs. Phthisis could not deceive him, he could recognise its presence at a glance. This man was as strong on his legs as a panther; no consumption there.

"Well," said the Colonel, impatiently, "there's evidently something wrong with him, no matter what, and I'm glad I'm not condemned to remain long in his society; for he certainly has the most unpleasant look in his eyes that I've seen since we left the lepers." And then he turned the current of the conversation, and the subject dropped.

That night very late, when the Colonel was sitting quite alone on deck, smoking a cigarette, and thinking over his approaching visit to Djavil, wondering what persons his old friend would have invited to his palace to meet him, and a thousand souvenirs

of the long-past pleasant Paris days thronging to his mind as he dreamily glanced up at the moon which smiled over slowly-receding Servia, a voice close by his ear, a slow, huskily sibilant high-pitched whisper, broke the stillness, saying in lisping French,—

“May I ask, Monsieur, by what right you dare to question persons about me?” and, turning, he saw standing by his shoulder the horrible man in shabby black, his eyes glaring with exceptional ferocity from between the red bare lids, and the diamond-decorated, claw-like hand grasping convulsively the soiled white muffler, presumably to prevent the vehemence of his speech from causing it to slip down.

Hippy rose to his feet at once, and, as he did so, his face passed close to the half-shrouded countenance of the man who had addressed him, and the familiar sickening smell of animal musk full of repulsive significance to the experienced traveller assailed his nostrils.

“What do you mean?” he exclaimed, shrinking back, his disgust quite overpowering for the moment every other sentiment. “Stand back! Don’t come near me!”

The man said nothing, stood quite still, but Rowan saw plainly in the moonlight the red-encircled eyes gleam with renewed ferocity, the yellow, claw-like hand wearing the diamond ring and grasping the dirty muffler agitated by a convulsive spasm, and heard beneath the silken covering the husky breathing caught as in a sob. Hippy recovered himself at once. “Forgive me, Monsieur,” he said, coldly. “You startled me. Might I beg you to repeat your question?”

The man said nothing. It was evident that he had perceived the disgust he had inspired, and that his anger, his indignation, mastered him, and that he dared not trust himself to speak.

“You asked me, I think,” continued the Colonel in a more gentle tone—for his conscience smote him as he reflected that he might perhaps involuntarily have caused pain to one who, notwithstanding his unpleasant aspect, and arrogant, not to say hostile, attitude, was doubtless merely an invalid and a sufferer—“You asked me, I think, Monsieur, by what right I made inquiries concerning you? Pray pardon me for having done so. I have, indeed, no excuse to offer, but I am really sorry if I have offended you. I merely asked the Captain——”

But the man interrupted him, his voice, which was tremulous with passion, coming as a husky, wheezy hiss, which rendered the strong lisp with which he pronounced the French the more noticeable and grotesque.

“You asked him—you dared ask him if I were not a leper. He told Hoffmann, the steward’s boy, who told me. You can’t deny it! Dog of an Englishman!”

Here, gasping for want of breath, and apparently quite overpowered by his anger, the man took a step towards Rowan. This outburst of vituperation came as a great relief to the Colonel. Like most persons of refined feeling, he could stand any wounds better than those inflicted by self-reproach, and the suspicion that perhaps by careless rudeness he had caused pain to one worthy only of pity had been as gall to him. The man’s violent hostility and bad language entirely altered and brightened the aspect of affairs.

“I am sorry,” said Hippy, with ironical politeness, “that my nationality should not meet with the honour of your approval. It is not, hélas! the proud privilege of all to be able to boast that they are natives of Moldavia, you know! *Pour le reste*, all I can do is to repeat my apology for——” But the man interrupted him again.

“Apology!” he echoed, if indeed any word indicative of resonance can be applied to the hoarse, damp, lisping whisper in which he spoke—“Apology! Ah, yes! You English curs are all cowards, and only think of apologies. You dare not fight, canaille, but you shall! I’ll force you to!” And again he took a step forward, but this time in so menacing a fashion that the Colonel, half amused and half disgusted, thought it prudent to step back.

"Take care!" he said, half raising his stick as if to push the man back as an unclean thing: "keep your distance,"—and then, speaking quickly, for he feared an assault from the infuriated Moldavian, and was desirous of avoiding such an absurd complication, he continued, "If you can prove to me that I ought to meet you, I shall be happy to do so. You're right, of course, in thinking duels are no longer



the fashion in England. But I'm an exception to the rule. I've fought two already, and shall be happy to add to the number by meeting you if it can be arranged. But

that's hardly a matter you and I can properly discuss between ourselves, is it? Captain

Pellegrini knows me. I'll leave my address with him. I have friends in Turkey, and shall be staying in the neighbourhood of Constantinople for a fortnight, so if you care to send me your seconds, I will appoint gentlemen to receive them. Allow me to wish you good-night!" and Rowan raised his hat with much formal politeness, and stepped

aside as if to depart; but the man sprang forward like a cat and stood in his way.

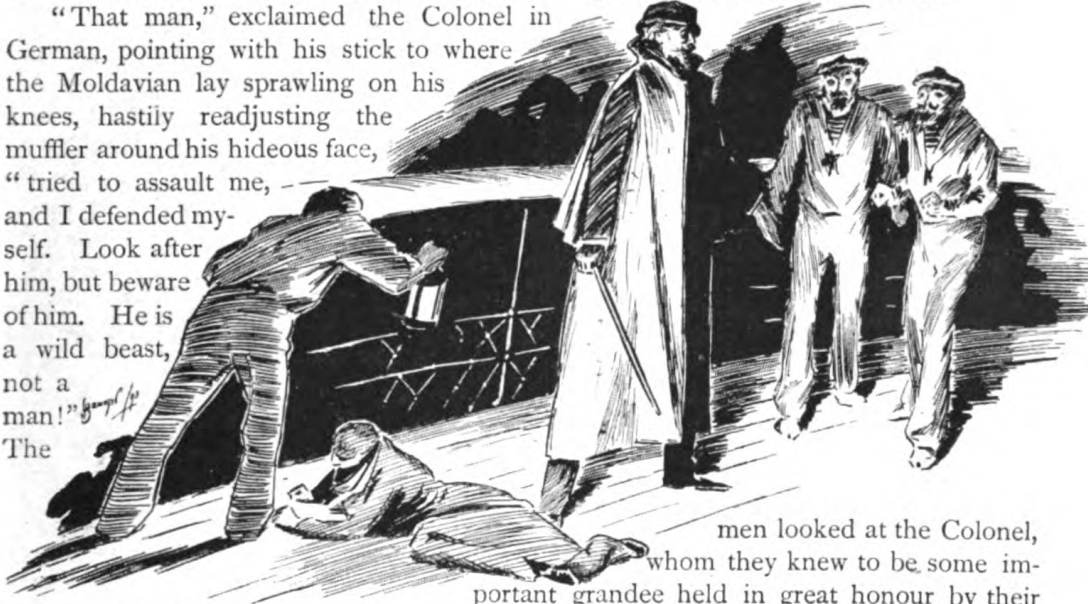
"Coward!" he exclaimed, extending both arms as if to bar Rowan's passage—"Cur! like all your countrymen! You think to run away from me, but you shall not! You shall go on your knees and beg my pardon, you accursed Englishman—you dog—you——"

But just as the enraged Moldavian reached this point in his fury an awful thing happened. The yellow, claw-like hand having been withdrawn from clutching at the dirty muffler, the vehemence of the man's speech began gradually to disarrange this covering, causing it little by little to sink lower and lower and thus to disclose by degrees to Rowan a sight so strange, so awful, that, impelled by a morbid curiosity, he involuntarily bent his head forward as his horror-stricken eyes eagerly noted every step in the infernal progress of this revelation. And thus, gazing at the slowly slipping silk, he saw first, beardless, hollow cheeks, twitching with emotion, but of a most hideous pallor, of indeed that awful hue inseparably associated with the idea of post-mortem changes, then, in the middle of this livid leanness, lighted only by those fever-fed, red-lidded eyes, the beginning—the broad base springing from the very cheekbones as it were—of a repulsive prominence which apparently went narrowing on to some termination which as yet the scarf hid, but which the horrified Colonel felt every second surer and yet more sure could not resemble the nasal organ of a man, but rather the—ah, yes! the silk fell, and in the moonlight Rowan saw the end he had foreseen, the pointed nose as of a large ferret, and beneath it, far in under it, nervously working, the humid, viscous horror of a small mouth almost round, but lipless, from which came in hurried, husky sibilance the lisping words of hate and menace.

This awful revelation, although partly expected, was so inexpressibly horrible when it came, that, doubtless, the expression of disgust in Rowan's face deepened so suddenly in acuteness and intensity as to arrest the attention of the monster who inspired it, infuriated though he was; for he paused in the lisping tumult of his violence, and, as he paused, became suddenly aware that the muffler had slipped down. Then, rightly interpreting the horror he saw written in the Colonel's countenance, and goaded to a fresh fit of fury, too despairing and violent even for words, he, with an inarticulate moan or whimper, rushed blindly forward with extended arms to attack his enemy. But the Colonel, who had foreseen this onslaught, stepped quickly

to one side, and, as he did so, quite overpowered by disgust, he could not resist the temptation of giving the hostile monster a violent push with his heavy walking-stick—a thrust of far greater force than he had intended, for it caused the man to totter and fall forward, just as two or three sailors, who, from a distance, had witnessed the last incidents of the dispute, ran up and stood between the adversaries.

"That man," exclaimed the Colonel in German, pointing with his stick to where the Moldavian lay sprawling on his knees, hastily readjusting the muffler around his hideous face, "tried to assault me, and I defended myself. Look after him, but beware of him. He is a wild beast, not a man!"



The men looked at the Colonel, whom they knew to be some important grandee held in great honour by their Captain, and then at the shabby mass of black clothes sprawling on the deck, and then at each other, and marvelled greatly, open-mouthed, not knowing what to say or think or do.

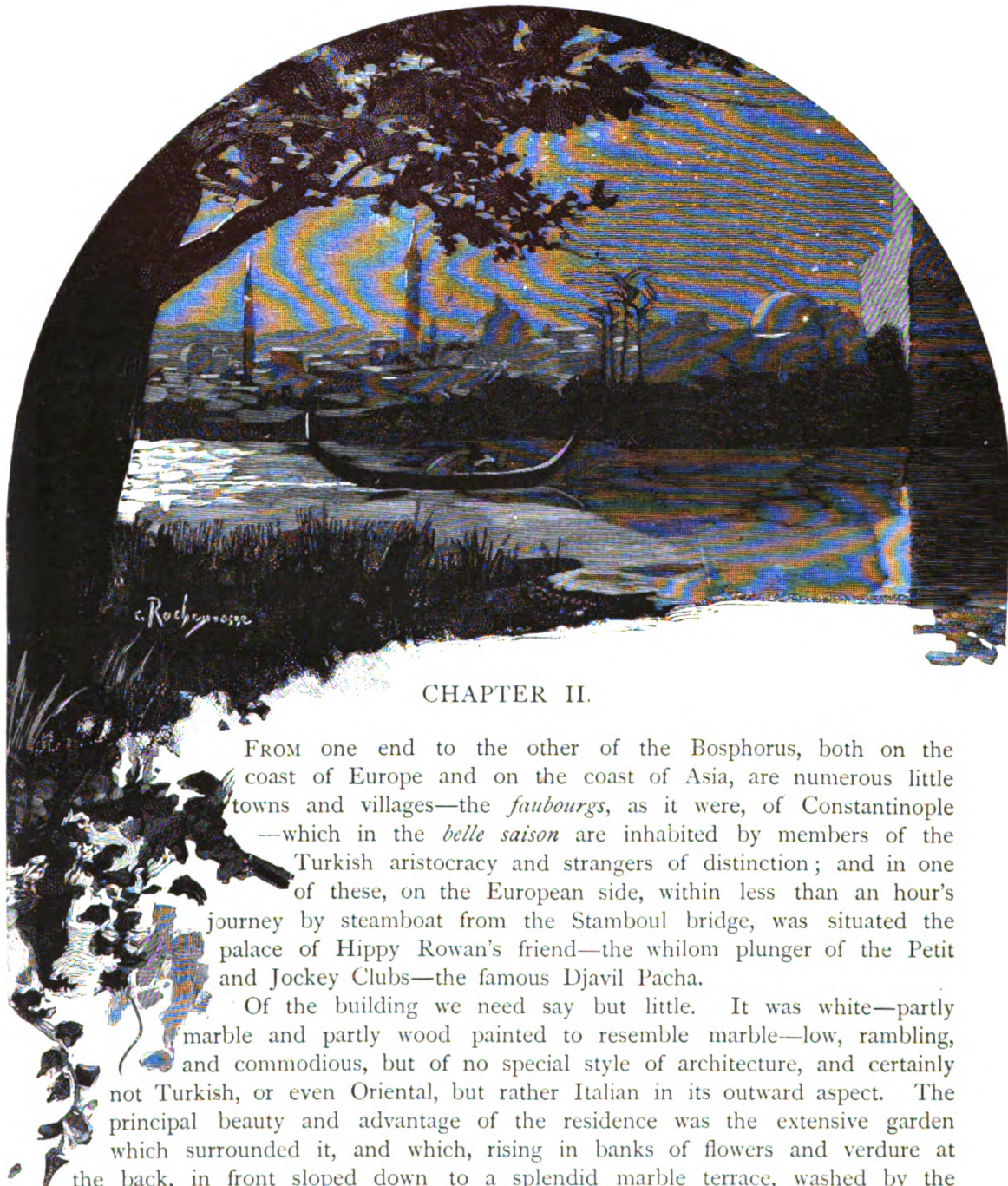
"I shall see the Captain about this to-morrow morning," continued Rowan. "But in the meantime, as I say, look after this—this—man, but beware of him!" and so speaking, he turned and strode away in the direction of his cabin.

Just before reaching the stairway he turned and looked back. There in the moonlight stood the man in black, gazing after him, the awful face hidden once more in the dirty muffler, which was now stained on one side with the blood which came trickling down from a wound on the brow. As he saw the Colonel turn, the man raised his clenched fist and shook it very slowly, solemnly, and deliberately—the gesture of a warning and of a curse—and the sailors, fearing further violence, closed around him. Then the Colonel turned and went his way to bed. The following morning Rowan of course made his faithful Adams (who, by the way, was never astonished at anything, having acquired through long residence in the East the stolidity of the Oriental) fully acquainted with the strange events of the preceding night, but charged him to say nothing to anybody.

"I have thought the matter over," said the Colonel, "and have decided merely to tell the Captain that I had a few words with this man, and in a heated moment struck him, and then give Pellegrini his Excellency's address where we shall be for the next fortnight, so that if this man wants to communicate with me in any way, he can. Of course any question of a duel with such a brute is absurd, but I hope he won't attempt to assault me again to-day."

"I'll keep a sharp look-out he doesn't, sir," said Adams.

But such precautions were unnecessary. Nothing more was seen of the Moldavian, who presumably was confined to his cabin by his wound, and the following morning at early dawn the Colonel and his servant left the steamer at Rustchuck and took the train to Varna and the Black Sea, *en route* for the splendours of the Bosphorus.



CHAPTER II.

FROM one end to the other of the Bosphorus, both on the coast of Europe and on the coast of Asia, are numerous little towns and villages—the *faubourgs*, as it were, of Constantinople—which in the *belle saison* are inhabited by members of the Turkish aristocracy and strangers of distinction; and in one of these, on the European side, within less than an hour's journey by steamboat from the Stamboul bridge, was situated the palace of Hippy Rowan's friend—the whilom plunger of the Petit and Jockey Clubs—the famous Djavil Pacha.

Of the building we need say but little. It was white—partly marble and partly wood painted to resemble marble—low, rambling, and commodious, but of no special style of architecture, and certainly not Turkish, or even Oriental, but rather Italian in its outward aspect. The principal beauty and advantage of the residence was the extensive garden which surrounded it, and which, rising in banks of flowers and verdure at the back, in front sloped down to a splendid marble terrace, washed by the waters of the Bosphorus, that led to the Pacha's private landing-place and quay, whereby was moored the private steam-launch of his Excellency.

Djavil was a bachelor, kept no harem, and lived in European style, his head cook and the chief assistants of that artist having been imported direct from Bignon's, while the palace was throughout furnished by a *tapissier* from Paris; the only concession to Turkish prejudices which a careful observer might have remarked being the absence of statuary and paintings—the Koran, as we know, forbidding the reproduction in painting of animate objects, and Djavil having, before

leaving the French capital, disposed of his splendid canvases and marbles in the Rue Drouot—whether induced to make this sacrifice by religious motives or for more sordid reasons, who shall say?

In Constantinople—which, by the way, is the most backbiting, tittle-tattling, scandalmongering little village in the world—the ex-Ambassador and old Parisian *viveur* was greatly blamed for living in so thoroughly European a fashion, keeping open house, constantly entertaining the most distinguished members, male and female, of the European colony. The clever and ambitious Djavil, however, cared nothing for such disapproval, so long as he retained the favour of the Sultan and the Grand Vizier (the gambler and *roué* of the Rue Royale and Rue Scribe having now developed into a hard-working Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs). He quite determined to live his private life as he pleased since he devoted his public life to the service of his country, and when the day's work was over and he embarked on his steam-launch on his return journey to his palace, he left behind him the Turkish statesman and became again purely and simply the cosmopolitan man of pleasure.

Of other permanent guests beside himself at the palace, Hippy found but three—his old friend, a well-known gambler and breaker and taker of banks, Lord Melrose; an amusing French newspaper man, Emile Bertonneux by name, of the Paris *Œil de Bœuf*—and last, but not least, the universally popular Tony Jeratzesco, whom Hippy had last seen in the Birdcage at Newmarket some months before, and whose sudden and mysterious disappearance from St. James's Street, which loved him so well, to go to take possession of a property just left him in some outlandish country by a recently-deceased relation, was still the talk of London. Not that London had any reason to be astonished at anything, whether good or evil, that might befall the popular sportsman; for Tony Jeratzesco was altogether a mystery, and nobody knew anything whatever about the man familiarly nicknamed "Cheery and Cheeky," whether he was rich or poor, married or single—patrician by birth or plebeian, nor indeed of what nationality he might boast himself to be, whether Austrian, Hungarian, Bohemian, Pole, Moldavian, Russian, Wallachian, Servian, Bulgarian or Montenegrin—Jew, Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhist—he was good-looking, amiable, refined, and well-dressed, and, moreover, was endowed to a very marked degree with the rare and precious gift of being able to both win and lose money admirably well; in no wise allowing either the smiles or frowns of Fortune to disturb the serene reign of the perfect good taste which presided over all his affairs. When this had been said, and the facts chronicled that he was fond of cards and racing, and always seemed to have plenty of money to justify his interest in both these expensive forms of speculation, and that he enjoyed a close personal friendship with some of the most exalted personages of the realm—the authentic data wherewith to compose a biographical sketch of Count Jeratzesco would be perhaps exhausted, although of course scandal both benevolent and malignant was constantly taking up the wondrous tale of the great success of this mysterious stranger and adventurer in the best of our rude island society—and enriching it with rare and marvellous broideries of fancy.

For once, however, rumour, in dealing with the private affairs of "Cheery and Cheeky," would appear to have been correct. A relative had died—an uncle—and left Tony a mysterious castle and many acres in Moldavia, not far from the little town of Sereth, and the Count had come over to stay with Djavil solely because he knew Hippy Rowan, Lord Melrose, and others *ejusdem farinae*, would be gathered together under the Pacha's hospitable roof-tree, and he was desirous of making up a house-warming party of friends to accompany him to his new possessions, and enjoy some of the shooting for which the place was famous. This plan met with general approval, and Jeratzesco found no difficulty in forming a pleasant company

to return with him to Moldavia ; for though Dick Rowan, Lord Melrose, the Count and the French *chroniqueur* were the only permanent residents beneath the Pacha's roof during this fortnight, the four remaining guest-chambers in the palace were never empty, and there was a constant ebb and flow of all kinds of persons, all more or less invited by the Pacha : people from our Embassy, and people from every other Embassy, people of every rank and position : from a very Broad Church English divine who was sent on, out of sheer mischief, by our Ambassador, Lord Malling, and who came accompanied by his florid, comely, and substantial spouse, both inclined to be slightly querulous about the Holy Places until they had tasted the water-drinking Djavil's incomparable Yquem ; to a very beautiful and wayward Italian diva, who came accompanied by two of her adorers, likewise blessed with the gift of song, and who made every one weep (including the *chef* from Bignon's, who listened outside) when she and her friends after dinner (all three slightly intoxicated) interpreted, as only angels fired with a few goblets of St. Marceaux can, Verdi's divine Requiem. So pleasantly did the time pass that it was with regret Colonel Rowan saw the termination of his visit drawing nigh, and heard one morning Jeratczesco, impatient to assume his unwonted *rôle* of host, solemnly announce that in four days' time he should depart to his home in the Karpaks, taking with him the companions he had selected. Then, to celebrate the approaching departure of the popular Hippy Rowan, Djavil gave a sylvan picnic, which, for many months after, was the subject of much gossip on both sides of the Bosphorus, and from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmora—an entertainment destined, alas ! to be fraught with fatal consequences to the gentleman in whose honour it was given. The rendezvous was for ten o'clock in the morning, at the sweet waters of Asia—where an insignificant little streamlet loses itself in the Bosphorus ; and the guests, about twenty in number, arrived at the place of meeting with surprising punctuality,—some coming with Djavil in his steam-launch, and some from Constantinople.

But for our limited space we would introduce each one of these somewhat notable individualities singly to our readers. Leopold Maryx, the dissipated, irregular and eccentric savant, the renowned specialist for nervous diseases, who had been summoned from Vienna on purpose to see the Sultan ; Lord Malling, our delightful but impossible Ambassador ; Lord, and especially Lady, Brentford, the champion political bore in petticoats, the victim to high principles, who had bullied her half-witted husband into believing he had a conscience on the occasion of the Reform Bill of 1867, and who, since then, had been dedicating her life to impotent though vigorous denunciations of what she termed the "treachery" of the Tory County Members, and the "infamy" of the County Caucus ; Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, the New York millionaire and sportsman, a rough, boasting, but withal good-hearted giant, who, although vulgar beyond even the power of dynamite to purify, was vastly amusing, owing to the fact of his having only begun his boisterous youth at the age of forty-five ; Frank Silveyra, the famous Hebrew financier and prince of good fellows from Vienna, and his friend, the no-less-delightful young Jew millionaire and artist, Raphael Sciamia ; the smart and enterprising little Alec Torquati, who had won our Derby at far distant Epsom the previous year with "Kyber" ; and, finally, three very beautiful and witty, and altogether attractive, ladies of high degree from Paris, who, accompanied by their husbands, had come all the way from the Seine to the Bosphorus on purpose to be admired, and three very magnificent young Cavaliers of the Guard who had come all the way from the Neva to the Bosphorus on purpose to admire and to manifest their admiration.

Ten carriages awaited Djavil's guests on the Asian coast, and into nine of these the party clambered ; the tenth and last being reserved for a valet-de-chambre provided

with all that could be required for the dispensing of light refreshments *en route*. And thus, with servants of the Pacha mounted on faultless little Arab horses racing up and down on either side of the carriages, bringing every now and then from the hindmost vehicle fruit and sandwiches, and bottles of champagne and Bordeaux wherewith the weary travellers might be refreshed, this gay and brilliant party dashed into the interior of Asia at full gallop. It had been arranged that the *déjeuner champêtre* should take place in the Forest of Alem-Dagh; and when, after a drive at steeplechase speed of three hours' duration, this spot was reached, it was indeed made manifest that Djavil had neglected nothing to make this fantastic breakfast a success. Here, to this wild, deserted, picturesque spot in the heart of a forest in Asia, a romantic nook apparently miles away from any trace of European civilisation, this very *grand seigneur* had sent the evening before—accompanied by an army of *marmitons*—his *chef*, whose education had been perfected in the famous kitchen on the corner of the Chaussée d'Antin and the Boulevard des Italiens; and with this great artist and his assistants had come vast and numerous vans drawn by bullocks, and containing all the requisites for cooking, and the food, and wine, and silver, and decorations, and furniture,—in fact, all that could be imagined by a wealthy and experienced voluptuary and man of the world to be necessary to make this *déjeuner sur l'herbe* for twenty persons an entertainment worthy of both host and guests.

The viands provided by Djavil (who, being a Turk, possessed that stubborn and rough Oriental palate which apparently can never be trained to a proper appreciation of the most precious and delicate secrets and traditions of *la grande cuisine*) were of a very substantial character; but the long journey had aroused appetites wholly beyond the power of sandwiches and goblets of St. Marceaux to satisfy, and the Pacha's guests eagerly sought consolation in the introductory *œufs à la Béchamel* as a hidden orchestra of the best musicians to be found in Constantinople ravished the Asian air with heaven-inspired passages telling of the jealousy of Amneris and of the ill-fated love of Radamès and Aïda.

"This is the most perfect still champagne I ever drank! Where did you get it, Djavil?" And so speaking, Mr. Leonard P. Beacon put down his glass and felt in his pocket for the note-book wherein he was accustomed to inscribe such precious addresses.

Life at best is short, but he, Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, had, to speak Hibernicé, only begun when already half through it; and as he always wanted the best of everything, and had no time to lose in personal quests after supreme excellence, he was always glad to take advantage of short cuts through the experience of friends. But the good-natured and adipose Pacha shook his head and smiled.

"No, no, *mon cher*. 'Tis a secret. Were I to tell you, you'd buy it all up and take it back with you to America. But, if you like it, I daresay I can spare you a few dozen. Ask Hassan yourself."

Here a very high-pitched "Oh! how terrible!" from Lady Brentford disturbed the wit-winged chatter of the three lovely Seine-side dames with their three adoring flowers of Slav chivalry; disturbed the husbands of these dames, who were engaged in an animated discussion among themselves as to the merits of cooking in oil; disturbed the Dowager Duchess, who, while listening to Raphael Sciamia's enthusiastic account of the priceless Giulio Clovio he had unearthed a fortnight before in Venice, had been endeavouring, and not without success, to rekindle by means of a visual current of sympathy with the youthful Alec Torquati the flame of passion in those orbs which had first flashed with that all-devouring fire early in the fifties: disturbed Tony Jeratzesco, who was explaining some Newmarket matters to Baron Silveyra while Lord Brentford and our Ambassador listened; and disturbed, in fact, the original cause of this disturbing cry, the loud-voiced Leopold Maryx, whose remarks to Hippy

Rowan had elicited this startling exclamation from Lady Brentford, who sat next to him and had overheard them.

"Dr. Maryx is saying such awful things," said her ladyship, shaking her head. "He says he believes in people being possessed of devils." Then, even as she spoke, her mind reverted to the terrible events of 1867, those famous "Resolutions" and the way the Borough members had been treated, and she felt that the great Professor might not perhaps after all be mistaken.

"Ah, no! you misunderstood me, Lady Brentford!" exclaimed Maryx, laughing. "What I said was, I saw no reason why, if people were ever possessed of evil spirits, as we are told they used to be, we should believe such things to be impossible now. Is the world any better now than it was on the day when the swine ran down that steep place and were choked in the lake? I didn't say that I believed in such things, for I don't; but, certainly, if I believed they ever existed, I should think they were as likely to exist now as ever."

"Maryx was telling me about the Children of Judas," remarked Hippy Rowan, by way of explanation.

"The Children of Judas!" echoed Emile Bertonneux, the Parisian newspaper man, scenting a possible *article à sensation*—for it is, we suppose, hardly necessary to remind our readers that in so cosmopolitan a gathering the conversation was carried on in French—"Who are they? I had no idea Judas was a *père de famille*."

"It's a Moldavian legend," replied the great specialist. "They say that Children of Judas, lineal descendants of the arch traitor, are prowling about the world seeking to do harm, and that they kill you with a kiss."

"Oh! how delightful!" murmured the Dowager Duchess, glancing at Alec Torquati as if inviting, and indeed expecting, just such homicidal osculatory tribute from the lips of the young Derby winner.

"But how do they get at you to kiss you?" gasped Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, his thirst for information leading him to ignore the fact that his mouth was full of *loup sauce homard*.

"The legend is," said Maryx, "that in the first instance they are here in every kind of shape—men and women, young and old, but generally of extraordinary and surpassing ugliness, but *are* here merely to fill their hearts with envy, venom, and hatred, and to mark their prey. In order to really do harm, they have to sacrifice themselves to their hatred, go back to the infernal regions whence they came—but go back by the gate of suicide—report to the Chief of the Three Princes of Evil, get their diabolical commission from him, and then return to this world and do the deed. They can come back in any form they think the best adapted to attain their object, or rather satisfy their hate: sometimes they come as a mad dog who bites you and gives you hydrophobia—that's one form of the kiss of Judas; sometimes as the breath of pestilence, cholera, or what not—that's another form of the kiss of Judas; sometimes in an attractive shape, and then the kiss is really as one of affection, though as fatal in its effect as the mad dog's bite or the pestilence. When it takes the form of a kiss of affection, however, there is always a mark on the poisoned body of the victim—the wound of the kiss. Last summer, when I was at Sinaia in attendance on the Queen, I saw the body of a peasant girl whose lover had given her the kiss of Judas, and there certainly was on her neck a mark like this:" and Maryx took up his fork and scratched on the tablecloth three X's,—thus, XXX. "Can you guess what that's supposed to signify?" inquired the great physician.

"It looks like a hurdle," remarked Torquati.

"Thirty," exclaimed Lady Brentford.

"Of course," replied Maryx, "thirty—the thirty pieces of silver, of course—the mark of the price of blood."

*

"*Vous êtes impayable, mon cher!*" exclaimed Djavil, grinning. "Whenever you find it no longer pays to kill your patients you can always make money at the *foires*. Set Hippy Rowan to beat the drum at the door and you sit inside the van telling your wonderful *blagues*, and you'll make a fortune in no time."

"I hope you don't tell those horrible tales to the Sultan, Maryx," said Lord Malling, laughing. "You cure nervous diseases by frightening people to death, I think."

But the great Professor paid no attention to these flippant remarks; he was, indeed, notwithstanding his marvellous intelligence and extraordinary science and experience and skill, at heart a very charlatan and mountebank in his love of a gaping crowd; and the interest he saw depicted on the faces of his listeners delighted him.

"Did you say that in the first instance these Children of Judas are supposed to be very ugly?" inquired Colonel Rowan, his thoughts reverting to the awful face of that man Isaac Lebedenko who had assaulted him on the boat. The incident had almost wholly passed away from his memory until then, though he had noted it down in his carefully-kept diary; and he had, by the way, long ago told himself that he must have been mistaken in what he thought that horrible muffler had disclosed to him; that such things could not be, and that he must have been deceived either by some trick of shadow, or by some prank played on him by gout astride of his imagination.

"Yes," replied Maryx, "so runs the legend. This physical ugliness betokens, of course, the malignant spirit within. At that stage they may be recognised and avoided, or better still, slain; for they only really become dangerous when their hatred has reached such a pitch that they are prompted to seek a voluntary death and re-incarnation in order to completely satisfy their malignancy; for it is by the gate of suicide alone that they can approach the Arch-Fiend to be fully commissioned and equipped to return to earth on their errand of destruction. So if they are killed in their first stage of development, and not allowed to commit suicide, they are extinguished. When they return fully armed with power from Hell, it is too late; they cannot be recognised, and are fatal; for they have at their command all the weapons and artillery of Satan, from the smile of a pretty woman to the breath of pestilence. This voluntary self-sacrifice of hate in order to more fully satisfy itself by a regeneration, this suicide on the *reculer pour mieux sauter* principle, is of course nothing but a parody of the Divine Sacrifice of Love on which the Christian religion is based."

"I'm both sorry and astonished, my dear Leopold," said Baron Silveyra, smiling, "to see that your knowledge of diabolical matters is so faulty. How can you speak of three princes of evil? You must know that there are seventy-two!"

"Ah! you believe in the old system," rejoined Maryx, laughing and pouring himself out a tumblerful of Mouton Rothschild: "six multiplied by twelve, and then the seven million four hundred and five thousand nine hundred and twenty-six demons of inferior rank. But, *mon cher*, that's altogether out of fashion now; that brings you to six multiplied by one million two hundred and thirty-four thousand three hundred and twenty-one, or the old mysterious 'tetrade' of Pythagoras and Plato counting both ways.* We've altogether changed that down in Hades now." And then the great savant, who delighted above all things in gravely clothing nonsense in a garb of erudition, launched forth into a fantastic and witty description of the internal economy of the Kingdom of Satan, a satire in which he not only displayed an extraordinary amount of mystical knowledge, but which he enlivened by sly and apposite allusions to the Governments represented by Djavil and Lord Malling respectively; and these

* Perhaps the meaning of the Professor will be more apparent if we put the numbers in figures. He speaks of 72 Princes of Darkness (6 multiplied by 12) and 7,405,926 demons of an inferior rank. This last number, so strange apparently, is still the product of 6 multiplied by 1,234,321; and, as our readers can see, 1,234,321 presents to us both from right to left and from left to right the four numbers constituting the mysterious "tetrade" of Pythagoras and of Plato.

gentlemen replying to this banter in the same spirit, and appealing to the other guests, the conversation soon became general.

When the repast was at length over, every one began strolling about the woods, and Hippy Rowan, lighting a cigar, started for a ramble with his old friend Lord Malling. But they had not gone far when their host sent a servant after them to request his lordship to return and speak with him ; and so, the Ambassador turning back, Hippy continued his saunter by himself, penetrating by degrees into a somewhat remote and secluded part of the forest, the voices and laughter of the other guests becoming gradually fainter and fainter as he strolled on.

Suddenly, from behind a tree, a man sprang out upon him, and a knife gleamed in the sunlight, swiftly descending upon his heart. Hippy, quick as lightning, leapt to one side, striking up as he did so with his heavy walking-stick at the would-be assassin's arm, and with such force that he sent the knife flying out of the man's hand into the air ; and then turning, he dealt the villain a blow on the side of the head which brought him to the ground as one dead. It was the Moldavian, Isaac Lebedenko. Hippy had recognised the eyes gleaming over the dirty-white muffler the moment the man sprang out upon him ; and now, as he lay on the ground insensible, there could, of course, be no shadow of doubt about his identity, although he had so fallen, on one side, that the wrapper had not been disarranged from his face. We have said that, although enjoying the well-merited reputation of being the best-natured man in London, Dick Rowan had laid himself open to the reproach of having been most unduly harsh and severe in the numerous wars in which he had been engaged ; and this harshness, not to say cruelty, presumably ever latent in his nature, but which seemed only to be called to the surface under certain special conditions closely connected with peril and the excitement engendered thereby, now made itself apparent. The Moldavian had fallen on his side, and the shock of his fall had been so violent that, while one hand lay palm upwards and half open on the trunk of a large fallen tree, the other hand, palm downwards, had been thrown upon its fellow. It was rather a peculiar position for the shock resulting from a fall to have thrown the hands into, and of course indicated that the blow had been so severe that the man had not been able to make any attempt to break his fall, but had sunk to the ground like a doll. Such, at least, was the way Rowan explained the matter as he stood over his prostrate enemy, wondering in his mind how he could possibly contrive to secure the violent would-be assassin until such time as he should be able to obtain assistance and have him handed over to the authorities for punishment ; and just as he noticed the position of his hands his eyes caught the gleaming of the knife, which had fallen in the grass a little farther off. Hippy went to where it lay, and picked it up. It was a murderous-looking weapon indeed : broad, double-edged, and very sharp, though rather thick and not long ; and fitted with a big round handle of lead, destined, of course, to lend terrible momentum to any blow struck by it. Rowan looked at the knife, and then at the hands of the Moldavian, lying in so diabolically tempting a position ; and just then a quivering of the man's legs plainly indicated that he was recovering his senses. If it was to be done at all there was evidently no time to be lost ; so Rowan, taking the sharp instrument, and poising it point downwards over the man's hands, which were already beginning to twitch with returning consciousness, and using his huge walking-stick as a hammer, with one powerful blow on the broad heavy handle of the knife, drove it through both the hands of the Moldavian and into the trunk of the tree up to the very hilt. A slight and almost inaudible groan came from behind the white wrapper—that was all ; but Rowan could see that under the sting of the sudden pain the man had completely recovered consciousness, for the awful eyes, just visible above the muffler, were now open and fixed upon him.

"You miserable scoundrel!" exclaimed Rowan in German, his voice hoarse with anger. "You may think yourself lucky I didn't kill you like a dog when you lay there at my mercy. But I'll have you punished—never fear. Lie quiet there until I have you sent to prison."

The man said nothing: his awful eyes simply looked at Rowan.

"I have been forced, as you see," continued the Colonel, leisurely taking out a cigar and lighting it, "to nail you to the tree to prevent your escaping. Vermin is often treated so, you know. But I sha'n't inconvenience you for long. In a very few minutes I shall be sending people to unpin you and bind you properly, and have you taken off to prison. We have not seen the last of each other yet, my good friend—believe me, we have not."

Then the man spoke—it was almost in a whisper, but the words came with the horrible liquid lisp Rowan remembered with so much disgust. "No," he murmured, "we have not seen the last of each other yet—we have not."

"There's but little fear, I fancy, of your not being here when I send for you," resumed Rowan, after a moment's pause, during which he and the Moldavian had been steadfastly gazing at each other. "So we needn't waste more time now, and especially as you must be rather uncomfortable. So *à bientôt*." Then, just as he was turning away, he stopped. "In case," said he very quietly, "you should succeed in wriggling away before I send for you, and prefer mutilating your hands to suffering the very many lashes I shall certainly have administered to you, it's as well you should know, perhaps, that when travelling I invariably carry a revolver. I'm without it to-day—very luckily for you—by the merest accident. But I'm not likely to forget it again. So take care."

And then Rowan turned and began strolling very leisurely back to where he had left his friends. His last words had not been idly spoken, but were intended to first of all suggest, to the miserable wretch whom he left nailed to the fallen tree, that escape was not altogether impossible, provided he were ready to pay the terrible price of self-mutilation required; and, secondly, to indicate the humiliating nature and severity of the punishment in store for him, that he might decide whether escape at any cost were not preferable to such torture and degradation. For, as a matter of fact, Hippy Rowan, directly the first moment of anger and the accompanying spasm of malignant cruelty had passed away, had decided in his mind to proceed no further in the matter, and by no means to take upon himself the *ennui* and trouble of having the paltry villain more seriously punished than he had already been. Had he had his revolver with him, he would of course have killed the man; but, as it was, he had nailed him as vermin to a tree in a lonely forest in Asia, and there he would leave him to his fate. He might starve to death there, or escape by a terrible mutilation, or possibly with his teeth remove the knife; or somebody might happen to pass by and relieve him—though this last was hardly likely: but at all events he, Hippy Rowan, having warned the villain what to expect in the event of his again molesting him, would have nothing more to do with the matter, and, indeed, not even mention the disagreeable episode to his friends—at least, not at present.

When Rowan got back to the scene of the picnic, he found the preparations for departure just being completed; and in a few minutes all Djavil's guests were once more comfortably ensconced in the carriages and on their way back to the Bosphorus, but this time by another road, which their host had reserved as an agreeable surprise, and which led through scenery of great beauty,—first, after fairy vistas of sylvan solitudes and entanglements, through a squalid though picturesque little village, the inhabitants of which, men and women and children, came running out after the carriages in great excitement, calling out and holding up their hands for alms; then past an encampment of Tziganes, who were singing and playing and dancing; then

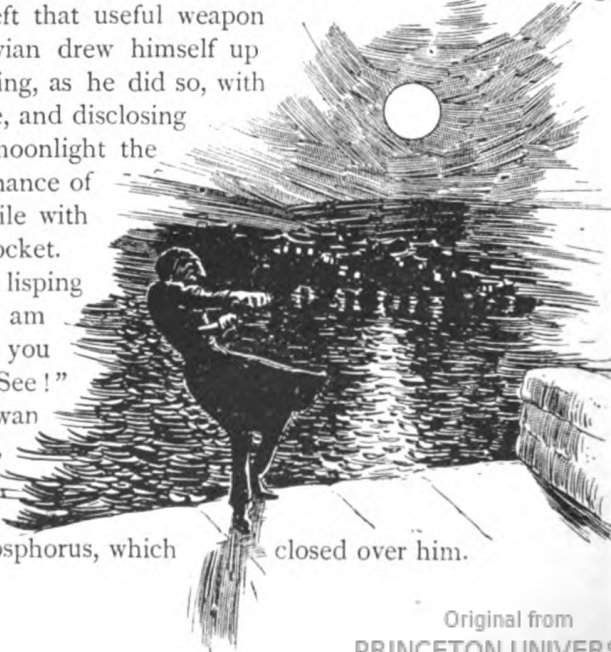
across a lonely plain, over which here and there in the far distance, and standing out in bold relief against the horizon now all ablaze with the glory of the setting sun, passed bullock carts full of peasants, grouped together with Oriental and artistic grace, going home after the day's toil; and then at last, as the sun disappeared to their left behind the islands of the Sea of Marmora, to where the splendid panorama of the Bosphorus bathed in twilight lay at their feet. There, by the waterside, the party broke up—all but those persons staying with Djavil going back to Constantinople in a steamboat provided for their convenience by their host, and the others, including of course Hippy Rowan, returning to the Pacha's palace in his Excellency's steam-launch.

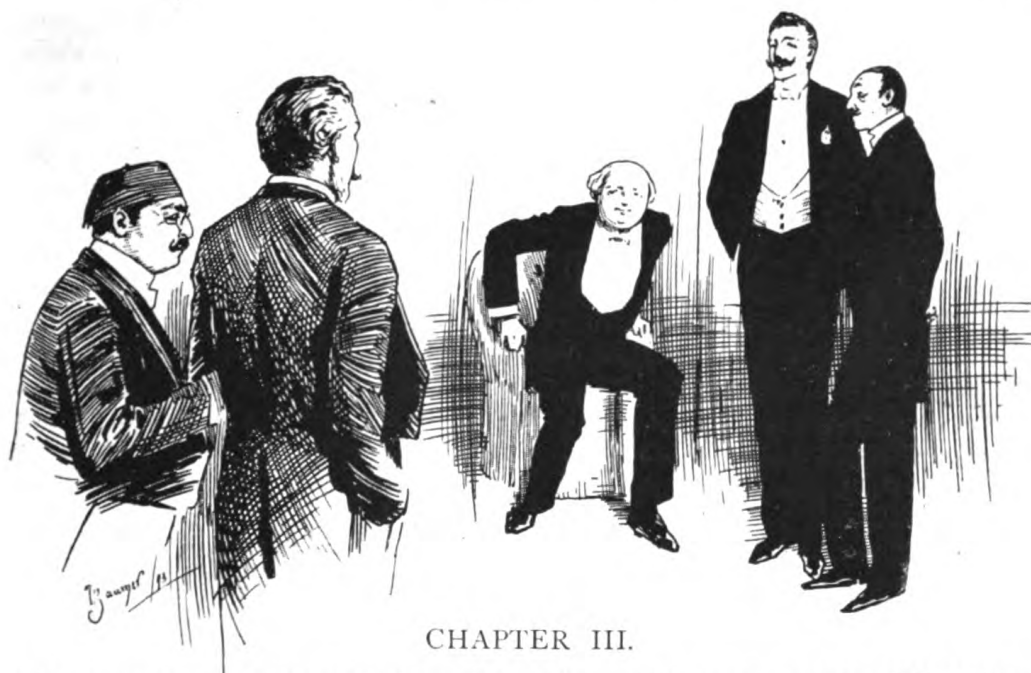
The scene returning home was beautiful indeed. It was evening, and the sea was very quiet, for after sundown no boat leaves the Bosphorus, neither is any vessel allowed to enter therein before the dawn; so that the only sound which broke the stillness when the music had died away in the distance was the noise of the screw, which, working in the phosphorescent waters, rolled out showers and sheets of gold as the little steam-launch plodded, plodded, plodded on its course, cleaving and leaving on either side and behind a way of liquid fire. Above were the heavens sparkling with stars, below and around the sea of molten gold, while on either side on the silent banks of the Bosphorus gleamed and streamed innumerable lights from the different harem-windows, at some one of which every now and then an inquisitive head would appear, peeping out at the passing vessel.

All Djavil's guests were tired; so after dinner, a little music and chatting, and some very harmless gambling, they retired to rest much earlier than usual, Rowan being indeed glad when the time came that, unobserved and alone, he could deliver himself up wholly to his reflections, which happened that night to be of a strangely melancholy complexion. His rooms were on the ground floor, the windows indeed opening out on to the garden which sloped down to the marble terrace bordering the Bosphorus; and since it was to meditate rather than to sleep that Rowan sought retirement, the Colonel sent the faithful Adams to bed, lit a cigar and went out, descending to the waterside to enjoy the view. Hardly had he reached the terrace, however, when from its farther end, which lay in shadow, emerged, crawling in the moonlight along the white marble pavement, an awful figure, which he knew but too well—that of Isaac Lebedenko the Moldavian, the man whom he had left but a few hours before nailed to a tree in the forest in Asia. As Rowan saw the man, the man saw him; and as Hippy stepped back and hurriedly felt in his pocket for his revolver, remembering, even as he did so, that he had left that useful weapon on his dressing-table, the Moldavian drew himself up and sprang towards his enemy, pulling, as he did so, with one hand the muffler from his face, and disclosing with hideous distinctness in the moonlight the indescribable horror of the countenance of a monster not born of woman, while with the other hand he fumbled in his pocket.

"The only way!" he gasped, in lisping German: "the only way! But I am ready—glad; for I shall come to you now and you cannot escape me! See!" And so saying, and before Rowan could realise what was taking place, the man stabbed himself to the heart, and with a loud groan fell backwards into the waters of the Bosphorus, which

closed over him.





CHAPTER III.

"AND you say you were not frightened?" exclaimed Bertonneux of the *Œil de Bœuf*.

Hippy Rowan shook his head and smiled. "No, of course not," he said. Then he added, lowering his voice lest the others should hear him, "Do you know, it's a strange thing, *mon cher*, that never in my life have I known what fear is. It's no boast, of course, but a fact; and you can ask any one who's been with me in danger. There are plenty of them about, for I began with Inkermann and only ended with Candahar, not to speak of innumerable little private adventures more or less unpleasant between times, like the one I've just been telling you about, in fact. You know me well enough to feel that I'm neither a fool nor a coxcomb, and as a matter of fact this is not exactly courage, I fancy, but rather an absolute inability to entertain such a sentiment as fear. Just as some people are born blind and deaf and dumb."

The scene was an immense and lofty chamber, luxuriously furnished, half drawing-room, half smoking-room, in Tony Jeratzesco's house in Moldavia, in the Karpak Mountains, and the time about a month after the events recorded in the last chapter had taken place. It had been raining all day as it only can rain in the Danubian principalities, and so the sportsmen had been unable to get out: a particularly deplorable *contretemps*, seeing that, with the exception of the small contingent which had come on from the Bosphorus, and which included Rowan, the French journalist, Lord Melrose, the three very magnificent *Chevaliers Gardes* from the shores of the Neva, and Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, the guests of "Cheery and Cheeky" were wild, rough and boisterous neighbouring magnates, many of whom had never travelled beyond Bucharest, and none of whom possessed any of those very rare and precious qualities of heart and head, a combination of which in a fellow-captive can alone reconcile us to the common chain. These Boyards were, indeed, so inconceivably rough and uncouth that Tony Jeratzesco greatly regretted having on the occasion of his taking possession of his property conformed to the almost feudally hospitable custom of the country and invited these loud-voiced Nimrods and their retainers to take up their residence under his roof-tree for such time as the sport in the neighbourhood might meet with their approval. As it was, however, the mistake had been made: these strange beings had been asked and had come, and the evil was past recall; and although at certain times, and especially after dinner, when the alcohol began to lift its voice,

the society of the wealthy barbarians became almost unendurable, it had, of course, to be put up with and made the best of, all that Tony's more civilised friends could do being, almost in self-defence, as it were, to keep to themselves as much as was possible without risking giving offence to their unpleasant fellow-guests by this reserve. The house party was composed entirely of men, which, of course, did not add to the refinement of the gathering; and when, as at the beginning of this chapter, the tedium of a long and rainy day, thoroughly saturated with alcohol and tobacco, had reached the hour preceding midnight, the atmosphere of Jeratczesco's salon, either from an ethical or from a purely social point of view, would assuredly have compared unfavourably with that of most drawing-rooms in Mayfair.

To the French journalist Rowan had already told the story of his horrible adventure with Isaac Lebedenko and of the man's suicide—all of which events, together with minutes of what Maryx had said about the Children of Judas, were found carefully noted down in the Colonel's diary after his death—from which source of information and the testimony of Adams the present authentic account of these strange occurrences is taken; but Mr. Leonard P. Beacon not having heard the story before, Hippy had been prevailed upon to repeat it to him, the question and answer with which this chapter opens being the immediate consequences of the telling of this tale.

Hippy had spoken in a low tone, to avoid attracting attention; but he had not taken into consideration the boisterous nature of his American auditor, who now exclaimed at the top of his voice: "What! do you mean seriously to tell me, Rowan, that you have never known what fear is? that you simply can't be frightened by anything?"

Annoying as it was under the circumstances to have such a question put in so trumpet-tongued a fashion, Hippy plainly saw that the American would insist upon a reply to his thundered query, and that it would in no wise better matters to delay giving it.

"I do," said he simply; and then added, in a half-whisper, "I wish you wouldn't yell so, Beacon."

But it was too late: the half-tipsy Boyards, bored to death, and eager to seize upon any topic of conversation likely to furnish a pretext for violence of language, had heard the question and the answer, and an uproar ensued which Jeratczesco was powerless to quell, and in the course of which the amiability and good breeding of Dick Rowan were both put to a severe test by the clumsy banter and coarsely expressed incredulity of these uncouth noblemen. One gentleman especially, a certain Prince Valerian Eldourdza, who, owing to the fact of his having been educated at a Lycée in Paris, was looked upon as the Admirable Crichton of that part of Moldavia, pressed Hippy very hard, plying him with most personal and impertinent questions as to his belief in a future life, future punishment, the devil, and so forth, and at last, indeed, going so far as to solemnly declare that not only did he not believe in Colonel Rowan's inability to experience terror, but that he would himself undertake under a penalty of £4000 to frighten him. This somewhat offensive boast had, in the first instance, fallen from Eldourdza's lips in the heat of excitement, and probably without the speaker himself attaching any very great meaning or importance to his words; but the statement having been received with vociferous approval by the other Boyards, his Highness had been constrained to repeat the bet, and the second time give it a more specific form. "One hundred thousand francs," he repeated, bringing his very small and very unclean fist down on the table with much violence, "that I frighten you, Colonel, before you leave here—that is, of course, always provided you're not leaving at once."

"My friend is staying with me another month," interposed Jeratczesco, rather angrily. "But I can't allow such bets to be made in my house, Eldourdza. I hate practical jokes—we have quite enough of that kind of folly in England."

"They're afraid already!" sneered a very unpleasant-looking old Moldavian statesman, all lip and nose, chewing at his cigar in the corner of his mouth after the fashion of a dog with a bone.

"You leave this to me, Tony," said Rowan to his host, speaking quickly, and in English; then, turning to Eldourdza: "Let's understand each other plainly, Prince. What do you mean by fright? Of course you can startle me by jumping out from a dark corner, or by any trick of that kind. I make no bet about that kind of thing, of course; but I'll bet you an even hundred thousand francs, if you like, or a hundred and fifty thousand francs, that you don't make me experience what is generally and by every one understood by the word fright—a sentiment of fear, or of anything even remotely resembling fear. How shall we define it, for we must be clear on this point?"

"Hair standing on end and teeth chattering," suggested Mr. Leonard P. Beacon, who was greatly delighted at the turn affairs had taken, foreseeing an adventure and new experience of some kind.

"Exactly," replied Eldourdza, who had been consulting in a whisper with his friends, and absorbing yet another gobletful of champagne strongly laced with brandy. "Let those very words be used if you like—I'll bet you an even hundred and fifty thousand francs—two hundred thousand if you like" (Hippy nodded)—"that before you leave this place, four weeks from to-day, you shall be so frightened that your hair will stand on end, your teeth will chatter, and what's more, you'll call for help."

"Very well," assented Rowan, laughing, "*C'est entendu*"; but I sha'n't make you go so far as that, my dear Prince. I shall be quite ready to pay up if you do more than merely startle me in the way I spoke of just now—by some sudden noise, or jumping out at me, or some such silly prank. Anything even approaching fear, much less terror, of course, and I pay up at once. "And," he added good-naturedly—for he was fond of winning money, and the certainty of this £8000 was very pleasant to him—"luckily for you, Eldourdza, I happen to have the money to pay with if I lose. I was on every winner the last day at Baden—couldn't do wrong—and sent it all on to Gunzburg at once, where it is intact, for I didn't want to be tempted to gamble till I got to St. Petersburg."

And so this strange bet was made, and duly noted down with the approval of all, even Jeratczesco withdrawing his objection when he saw the very evident satisfaction with which the Colonel regarded what he felt sure to be the only possible result of this absurd wager.

But if Hippy Rowan had foreseen the wholly unexpected way in which this waiting day by day, night after night, and hour by hour for the surprise—of course of an apparently unpleasant nature—which Eldourdza and his friends must be preparing for him—had he, we say, foreseen the peculiar and unprecedented way in which this really absurd suspense was destined gradually, and by almost imperceptible degrees, to affect his nerves in the course of the next month—he would most assuredly have let the Prince's silly wager pass unnoticed. And what made this never-absent feeling of care, of perpetual caution, of unceasing vigilance, the more acutely irksome to Hippy, was that these novel sensations could be ascribed but to one altogether disagreeable and detestable cause—namely, the advance of old age. His experience of life had told him that the constitution of a man who had lived as he had lived was apt to break down suddenly, no matter how apparently robust it might be; the supports, the foundation, which kept the structure in its place and seemingly firm and upright, having been little by little, and very gradually but very surely, removed in the course of years, the nights of which had been worn to morning in the fatigue of pleasure, and the days of which had been scornful of repose. He had seen innumerable friends of his, apparently as strong and vigorous as himself, suddenly give way in this fashion—fall down like a house of cards, as it

were, and be swept away into the outer darkness. Could it be owing to the approach of some such sudden and disastrous conclusion to his mundane affairs, that he found, day by day, as the next four weeks wore on, his nerves, hitherto apparently of steel, becoming more and more unstrung by this suspense, the cause of which was in reality so utterly puerile and contemptible? This was very certainly not his first experience of suspense: he had been in danger of his life very often, and on a few occasions this danger had been imminent for a considerable period of time, and yet never could he recall having felt before this uneasiness of mind, this perpetual questioning of his heart, which he now experienced while merely waiting for these boorish savages to play some more or less gruesome, and even perhaps dangerous practical joke on him. It must be old age; it could be nothing else—old age, and the beginning, perhaps, of a general breaking-up of the system; the first intimation, as it were, of the second and final payment about to be required of him for those extravagances by Seine side already alluded to, those myrtles sacred to the sparrow-drawn goddess, those prolonged and oft-repeated saunters from midnight to dawn arm-in-arm with Bacchus and baccarat,—such outriders of Death's chariot, Rowan told himself, it must be, that induced him, greatly to his own surprise, to waste so much of his time twisting and turning over in his mind all kinds of possible and impossible speculations as to how these wretched Moldavians were going to try and frighten him. This led him to examine carefully his apartments every night before retiring to rest, and see that his revolver had not been tampered with and was safely under his pillow. Of course this very abnormal condition of mind, which in no wise even remotely resembled fear, and was one merely of perpetual watchfulness, was of very gradual growth, and Hippy Rowan was throughout the whole course of its development, until just before the end, sufficiently master of himself to conceal his feelings, not only from his friends, but even from his valet, the omniscient Adams; and the very visible change in the Colonel's appearance and manner, which by-and-bye came to be remarked, was ascribed by all—and in a great measure justly ascribed—to a very severe chill which he caught shortly after the night of the wager, and which confined him to the house, and indeed to his room, for many days. Neither Prince Eldourdza nor any one else had made any allusion whatever, in Rowan's hearing, to the wager since the night on which it had been made and formally noted down; and this fact in itself, this studied silence, became in the course of time, and as Rowan's nervous irritability increased, a source of annoyance to him, and induced him at length, suddenly, one morning, when they were all at breakfast together, to boldly allude to the matter, which was becoming more and more constantly uppermost in his mind.

"Pardon me, Prince," said he, smiling, and with well-assumed carelessness, "if I allude to the matter of our wager, which you seem to have forgotten, for you have only ten days left now, and——"

"Plenty of time!" interrupted Eldourdza roughly. "Forgotten it? Not I—have I?" he continued, turning to his friends. "You know whether I have forgotten it or not!" Significant and sinister grins and much shaking of heads in negation responded to this appeal,—a pantomime which excited the Colonel's curiosity not a little.

"Well," said he, "I'm glad to hear it, for I shouldn't like to take your money without your having had some semblance of a run for it. All I wanted to tell you was this, and I feel sure you'll agree with what I now say. Of course I've no idea what kind of prank you're going to play on me, to endeavour to frighten me, but no doubt it will be as horrible and awful a thing as you can concoct, for I suppose you've no intention of making me a present of two hundred thousand francs."

"Certainly not!" laughed Prince Valerian; "if you get it at all you'll have to pay dear for it, believe me."

"Very well," replied Hippy—"anything you like ; but that's just what I wanted to speak about. Of course I'm at your disposal to do anything you like with, and to try and frighten in any way and every way you can contrive ; but you can easily understand that there must be a limit to my endurance, otherwise you'd make me look like a fool. What I mean is, that you're at perfect liberty, say, to send any ghost or vampire or wild beast or devil, or anything else you can think of, to my room to try and frighten me, and for that purpose I am glad to lend you all the aid in my power. As it is, I leave my door unlocked every night now, as perhaps you know. But there must be some limit to this,—I mean that your endeavour to frighten me must have some limit in time, and can't go on for ever. Suppose we put it at one hour—for one hour let your ghost or devil do its worst : then at the end of that time, if it has failed to frighten me, your goblin will become merely a nuisance, and I think I shall be justified in extinguishing it, don't you ?"

"Most assuredly," replied Eldourdza. "In less than an hour : we don't ask for an hour—half an hour will do,—after half an hour you are perfectly at liberty to do as you like—provided always," he added grimly, "that by that time you are not half dead with fright."

"Very well, then," rejoined Hippy : "so that's understood. After half an hour from the time your test, whatever it may be, begins, I shall be free to use any means I care to adopt to put a stop to this test, provided by that time, of course, I have not felt anything even remotely resembling alarm. As in the event of your test being something really offensive and disagreeable to me I should probably use my revolver, I thought it only fair to have this plainly understood, so that what is really only a silly practical joke may not, by a misunderstanding, end in a tragedy."

The Prince nodded in acquiescence. "You are quite right," he said. "After half an hour do as you please. But you're mistaken in looking upon this as a practical joke, Colonel Rowan : it will be no joke, and may indeed, even against your will, end in a tragedy."

As may be readily imagined, these few mysterious words of menace from the man pledged, in some way or other, to cause him within ten days' time to experience the novel, but doubtless unpleasant, sensation of terror, did not tend to bring the Colonel to a more restful state of mind ; and his never-ending speculations as to what scheme these savages might perchance be planning wherewith to frighten him began again after this conversation to torment his brain with renewed persistency. Of course Eldourdza would do all he could to win his bet—not for the sake of the money, perhaps, for that could be nothing to him, but for the pleasure and delight of triumph ; and, equally of course—at least so Hippy told himself, this desired fright the Prince and his friends would only endeavour to bring about by some pseudo-supernatural agency, for they could hardly imagine that any of the vulgar dangers of life—say an attack of many adversaries, whether men or brutes, peril from water, fire, or what not ; in fact, any of the thousand-and-one not uncommon evils which threaten human existence—could possibly affright so hardened and experienced a soldier and traveller as he was, a man whose record of perilous adventures was so well known. The supernatural, therefore, the terrors which owe their horror to the fact of their being inexplicable, the power of them unfathomable ; the awful enemies which may be lurking crouched behind the last breath of life ready to spring upon us as the heart stops beating ; such, or rather the semblance of such, would doubtless be alone the influences which these wild barbarians would seek to bring to bear upon his nerves to try them. And when this probability having been suggested to his imagination, Colonel Rowan began recalling to mind all the gruesome stories he had ever heard of about ghosts, hobgoblins, and the like, his restlessness and nervous

watchfulness (to which he only gave way when in the privacy of his own chamber, of course) so increased as the last ten days sped by, that at length Adams, who slept in the next room, remarking his master's condition, arranged, without, of course, the knowledge of any one, to keep watch and ward over the Colonel during these last few nights by means of an aperture high up in the wall, through which he could obtain a perfect view of his master's sleeping apartment, and see all that took place therein.

So it came to pass that on the last night but two Hippy never retired to rest until the dawn, having decided, after mature reflection, that no matter what absurd practical joke his friends might be going to play on him, he would cut a less ludicrous figure in his dressing-gown than in bed, and that it might indeed be advisable to be thus prepared to follow the tormenting masqueraders from his chamber to punish them elsewhere, and before the whole household, in the event of their conduct proving too outrageous. And so, after having as usual carefully examined every hole and cranny of his sleeping apartment (as the unobserved Adams from his peephole above saw him do very plainly), and lighted many tapers about the old-fashioned and vast chamber, and put many cheering logs upon the fire, the Colonel lit a cigar and began pacing up and down the room, turning over of course in his mind the perpetual question—"What are these uncouth madmen going to do?" and the query for ever followed by the usual reflection—"They can do as they please, provided they don't, by their folly, make me look a fool." There would probably be the rattling of chains and bones, and some very cleverly contrived apparition; and even, in fact, some real danger, perhaps, for these men were really perfect savages, who would stop at nothing to attain their end; and Hippy would certainly not have been surprised to have found a box of dynamite concealed beneath his bed.

"Luckily, this is the last night but two," he said to himself—"and after all this bet has taught me one thing I never plainly realised before, and in a certain sense I have really lost the wager, for there is one thing I am afraid of, and very much afraid of, more and more afraid of every minute, and that is being made a fool of." Then he stopped in his perambulation and stared at himself in the looking-glass. Yes; he was certainly growing old: the grey hairs he cared nothing about—they were entirely insignificant; and the crows' feet and wrinkles were of no importance—they did not in the least annoy him; but the eyes, ah! the eyes were losing their light—that light that had disported itself over so many beautiful things. But then even a youthful face would look sad in so mystic a mirror—for it was very old, and evidently Venetian, and had doubtless been in that room in that castle in that remote corner of Moldavia for years and years, and seen perchance strange things,—and was destined (who could tell?) before three nights were over to reflect images of even more fantastic terror than had ever darkened it before. What a pity that this old looking-glass could not recall some of the most pleasant images that had been reflected in it in the long ago to keep him company that night! If he stared at it long enough, would he not, perhaps, at length perceive far, far away, there in the most remote and distant and least lighted corner of the room, reflected the fair sad face of some Moldavian dame who had wept and kissed and loved and lost in the old days of the Hospodars?

"Les miroirs par les jours abrégés de Décembre
Songent—telles les eaux captives—dans les chambres,
Et leur mélancolie a pour causes lointaines
Tant de visages doux fanés dans ces fontaines
Qui s'y voyaient naguère embellis de sourires."

Then, drawing up a comfortable armchair before the blazing logs, he seated himself, and taking up *Le Rouge et le Noir*, which he happened to find lying on the table by

his side, ere long had read himself to sleep over the marvellous narrative of the vicissitudes of Julien Sorel, only awaking, indeed, when the

“fair-faced sun,
Killing the stars and dews and dreams and desolations of the night,”

was plainly visible through the curtains, and the noises of the awakening household warned him that another day had begun. Then he arose and went to bed, fondly believing that by this little comedy he was deceiving the omniscient Adams, who, as a matter of fact, perched on a step-ladder in the adjoining apartment, had kept an unceasing watch over his master. That day, Rowan's last day on earth, passed without any incident worthy of notice. Jeratczesco announced at breakfast that he had engaged a band of *laoutari*—gypsy minstrels—to enliven his friends, but that, as he only expected them to arrive late that night, his guests would not have the opportunity of enjoying their wild and delightful music until the morning.

“I shall lodge them in your wing of the house, where they'll be quiet,” explained Tony to Colonel Rowan later on in the day, when they happened to be alone. “You know how beautiful some of these *tsigane* women are, and how jealously guarded by their men. I don't want a row here, and there's no knowing what mad folly Eldourdza and his friends might be up to when drunk.”

And that the prudent Tony was quite justified in taking all precautionary measures to ensure peace and tranquillity during the sojourn of the gypsies beneath his roof was amply proved that very night when they arrived late, for the Moldavian magnates, who, with Eldourdza at their head, would seem to have intentionally got drunk rather earlier than usual that evening, were only with the greatest difficulty restrained by their host from rushing out into the moonlit courtyard and embracing the women of the minstrel band, as they were seen and heard passing and chattering and singing on their way to their quarters. The arrival of these gypsies, and the prospect of the break which their performances would make in the monotony of the daily life at the château (which, by the way, all save the most enthusiastic sportsmen would have found intolerably tedious), greatly enlivened Hippy Rowan's spirits; and when he retired for the night—the last night but one of this absurd waiting for surprises, as he reminded himself with a smile—he opened his window and looked out across the quadrangle to the lights in the rooms occupied by the wandering musicians, wondering whether indeed this band contained any of those really beautiful women such as he remembered having remarked among the Strelna gypsy musicians of Moscow,—women unlike any other women to be found in any class or country in the world, and whose peculiar charm is as indescribable as it is indisputable, possessing as it does a power partaking of the supernatural, springing as it were from a fountain of infernal fascination. What a splendid night! And nearly Christmas too, the very season for ghostly masquerading, and—— But hark! a woman's voice singing.

Hippy leaned out and listened. The voice was low and very sweet, though the woman singing was evidently engaged in some other occupation which absorbed her attention, for there would be careless pauses in her song, the words of which in a Roumanian dialect ran somewhat as follows:

“Love shot his arrow o'er the Sea,
And all the waters leaped with joy,
Lifting their foam-wreathed arms in glee,
To bid the sunlight hold the boy;
But the Sun said
‘My beams are shed
To cheer with flowers the lonely dead.”

Here the singing ceased for a moment, but presently a man's voice took up the song, singing in the same careless fashion, stopping every now and then.

"Death spread his pinions o'er the Sea,
And all the waves with storm-thrilled breath
In sobs besought the Moon that she
Might break the tear-plumed wings of Death.
But the Moon cried
'My silver tide
Will only——'"

But here a merry burst of laughter interrupted the singer, and though for some time after Rowan could hear the voices of the gypsies laughing and talking, he could not distinguish what was being said, and there was no more singing.

"What a strange people!" murmured Rowan to himself, as he closed the window, "and what suitable neighbours to have on such a night as this, when at any moment now I may expect to see a cavalcade of ghosts come galloping into the room!"

Then the watchful Adams saw his master make his usual careful inspection of the room, seat himself by the fire, take up *Stendhal* again, and read himself to sleep.

Suddenly Rowan awoke, roused by a sound that stole into his ears very gradually and very gently, but which, when his drowsy faculties had understood its meaning, stirred them to instant activity—the sound of weeping. He sprang to his feet and looked around the room. He was alone; the apartment was brilliantly illuminated, thanks to two large lamps and several tapers in girandoles, and he could plainly see into the farthest corner: nobody—no animated creature was visible. He listened, but not a sound broke the stillness of the night. He must have been dreaming. But no—hark! there it was again, the sound of weeping, of some one in great and bitter distress: it came from the corridor, and not far from his chamber door. Should he go and see what it was? Could this be any part of the Moldavians' masquerading? Surely not! Hardly would they begin their attempt to frighten a man by such heartrending expressions of anguish, which could evoke but pity and compassion. Again! Oh, what a wealth of woe!

And a woman too: the long-drawn, gasping, tear-clogged suspiration was pitched in a key of peculiar pathos which that treasury of divine tenderness, a woman's heart, alone can find to woo compassion. Again,—yes, certainly a woman: could it perchance be one of the *laoutari*? The corridor led to the part of the house where they were sleeping, and, so far as he knew, they were the only women in the house except the servants. Surely Eldourdza had nothing to do with this; and even if he had, what then? Had not this drunken Moldavian boor already occupied his mind quite long enough with speculations as to what he might and what he might not be about to do? Let him do as he pleased, and what he liked, and go to the devil!

There was a woman in terrible distress just outside his door, and he, Hippy Rowan, must go to her without delay—that was very clear. So, taking his revolver in his hand in case of need, Rowan advanced, opened the door wide, and looked out into the sombre corridor, Adams, greatly frightened, watching his master the while, and, having heard nothing, was at a loss to understand the Colonel's conduct. Even as he opened the door Rowan saw that he had guessed aright, and that it was a woman who was giving utterance to these most pitiful and heartrending expressions of anguish. There she lay, not very near his door after all, weeping bitterly, her face buried in her hands—as if she had been praying on her knees for mercy, and in a very agony of supplication had fallen forward. Rowan saw at once that those white and shapely hands must belong to a young woman; and so his voice assumed a tone of very special tenderness and compassion, as he said, in the Roumanian dialect in which he had heard the gypsies singing:—

"What is it, lady? Can I help you?"

The mourner, who apparently had not remarked the opening of the door, at the sound of Hippy's voice ceased her lamenting; and after a moment's pause slowly raised her head, withdrawing her hands from her face as she did so, and revealing to Rowan's astonished eyes the most faultlessly lovely countenance he had ever gazed upon in living woman—a countenance different to anything Hippy had ever seen. Was it the moonlight pouring in through the uncurtained windows which gave it that ethereal radiance? Who could she be? That she was not a gypsy was very evident, for her skin was of the most fine and delicate fairness, and her hair, which fell in caressing curls over her forehead, of a soft and tender brown. Moreover her dress was entirely unlike that of a *tsigane*, both in colour and in form, being all black, and fashioned, so far as Rowan could see, as that of a member of some religious order, the beautiful face being, as it were, framed round about in a covering not unlike a cowl. Rowan had heard, he thought, of some sisterhood in the neighbourhood: perhaps this fair mourner belonged to such a community;—at all events she was assuredly a very lovely woman, and it behoved him, both as a man of heart and as a man of taste, to console her in her sorrow. But to attain this desired end, of course the first and most necessary step would be to make himself understood, and that, apparently, he had not so far succeeded in doing. The lustrous violet eyes looked at him, indeed, with startled surprise and fawn-like timidity, though there was assuredly nothing redoubtable in the kind aspect of Hippy's handsome face, and he had instinctively hidden the revolver in his pocket the moment he had seen the pathetic prostrate figure in the corridor; but beyond this half-frightened expression there was nothing to be recognised but sorrow in that lovely countenance: not the slightest indication that his words had conveyed to the mourner's mind any idea of sympathy and compassion. Again he addressed her, this time in no dialect, but in the purest Roumanian, and in a still more tender and sympathising tone than before; but the look of timid wonder in the sweet Madonna face remained unchanged. Then, feeling that the situation was becoming rather ludicrous, he said, this time speaking in German and beckoning towards the open door of his apartment,—

“Lady, let me beg of you to tell me what troubles you! Come into my room and rest and warm yourself. Believe me, there is nothing I would not gladly do to be of service to you. You have only to command me; I am an Englishman, a gentleman, and a soldier—so you may trust me. Let me help you, lady: come, I beg of you.” Then, after a pause, as the mourner neither spoke nor moved, Hippy bowed, and, motioning her to follow him, walked slowly into his room, turning every now and then and repeating his gesture of invitation;—she the while remaining upon her knees,—looking after him, indeed, but making no attempt to rise and follow.

Although Adams had at no time lost sight of his master, whose back, as he seemed to be engaged in conversation with some invisible person far down the corridor, had always been within the range of the faithful servant's vision, still it was with a feeling of great relief that he now saw the Colonel come back into the room unharmed, although the expression of tenderness and pity in his master's face rather puzzled the man, as did also the Colonel's conduct in turning when he had reached the fireplace and looking anxiously back towards the door which he had left open behind him, as if expecting and indeed longing for the arrival of some visitor. At length, after the lapse of a few minutes—a delay which, though brief, the servant could plainly see his master bore impatiently, the longed-for visitor slowly emerged from the darkness of the corridor until she stood framed in the doorway, against one side of which, as if to support herself, she lightly placed a small white hand. It was thus Adams saw the slender black-robed figure of a sweet girl mourner appear, and for the first time in his life was astonished, nay, astounded rather, at the marvellous resemblance

in depth of tenderness, in purity of sorrow-hallowed loveliness, between this nocturnal lady visitor to his master and a Madonna from a canvas, say, of Raphael, standing apparently before him clothed in flesh.

Perhaps some such fantastic idea of an incarnation of one of Raphael's Holy Virgins occurred to Rowan as he bowed low and advanced to welcome his fair visitor, for this time he addressed her in Italian, thanking her for the great honour she was doing him, making all kinds of graceful and very Italian protestations of sympathy and respect, and concluding a very pretty speech by begging her not to stay there on the threshold, but to come in and seat herself by the fire; adding that if his presence were in any way distasteful to her he would at once withdraw and leave her in undisturbed possession of the room. But this attempt, clothed in the choicest Tuscan, to inspire confidence, met with no greater measure of success than had attended its Roumanian and German predecessors. The sweetly sorrowful lady stood on the threshold in the same timid attitude, staring at the Colonel with no abatement in the tender melancholy of her face, but apparently in no wise understanding his words, and even, indeed, ignoring his gesture inviting her to enter and be seated.

What was to be done? He could hardly, of course, take this lovely girl-Madonna in his arms and drag her into his room by force; and yet it seemed intolerably absurd, and indeed impossible, to leave her standing there in the doorway. Why had she come even to the threshold of his door, if she had not intended coming farther / in the event of her seeing nothing to alarm her? Of course, and beyond all doubt, if he could only make her understand his sympathy and respect, and that she need have no fear of him, she would come in and perhaps tell him the cause of her distress, and let him help her; and on the other hand, knowing so many languages and even dialects and patois as he did, it seemed almost impossible that he should not be able at length to hit upon some form of speech by which he could convey to this most perfect incarnate type of spiritual purity and loveliness the expression of his devoted homage.

So he started off on a wild polyglottic steeplechase, making protestations of respect and sympathy and offers of aid and friendship in every language and dialect he could remember, from his native English to the patois spoken by the Jews in White Russia. But all to no purpose; and at length he was constrained to pause and acknowledge that he was utterly defeated.

"You're very beautiful," said he at last, with a sigh, speaking in his native English, the inability of his fair auditor to understand him possessing at least the meagre and thankless advantage of allowing him to express his admiration in words no matter how impassioned, provided, of course, he took care his face should not betray the significance and ardour of his speech—"the most beautiful woman I think I ever saw; but you're a beautiful riddle, and I don't know how to read you. What language can you speak, I wonder? Only the language of



love, perhaps ! Were I to kneel down there before you, or take you in my arms and kiss you, in what language would you repulse me, or—— ? ”

Here he paused, greatly surprised : were his eyes deceiving him, or was at length a change stealing over the Madonna face, and the timidity and sadness in it slowly giving place to an expression of some brighter sentiment ? That she could not understand the language he was speaking he felt sure, for he had already addressed her in it, and his words had evidently failed utterly to convey any meaning to her mind. But surely there was a difference now, and something he had said, or some gesture he had made, or some expression in his face, had been pleading to her, for the great shadow of melancholy was slowly passing from her. But between the language, the English he had used before and that which he had just spoken, what difference was there ? None, of course, save in the sense : then the words had been of respect and sympathy, now of love and tenderness. Could it be that by some marvellous intuition her woman's instinct had at once divined the more tender words ? or indeed was it not possible, nay, likely, that in speaking them he had involuntarily let their meaning be reflected in his eyes, and that she had read it there ?

But then such tenderness and affection were not displeasing to her ; and this Mask of the Madonna, this ideal type of womanly purity, could be lighted by the joy of love.

The thought set Rowan's blood coursing through his veins like fire, and made his heart beat as if he had been but twenty. He must see, and at once : he would speak to her again in words of affection, and let his eyes partly and by degrees interpret what he said, carefully of course, and always guided by what he should see her eyes reply to his, lest he should offend her. And so he began telling this lovely woman in very low, quiet and grave tones, but in words of great tenderness, how fair he found her, and as he spoke his eyes expressed the meaning of his words more and more clearly and ardently as he recognised with ever-growing delight that the Madonna face was being gradually illuminated and transfigured by joy, as word after word of ever-increasing passion, echoed in tender glances from his eyes, fell from his lips.

And as he spoke he did not advance towards her, but only clasped his hands and stood still far from her, looking at her in the doorway ; while she, more and more visibly affected by his ever-growing emotion, first withdrew her hand from the side of the door where she had leant it, and pushed back the cowl from her face a little, still further disclosing, by so doing, the wavy wealth of soft brown curls, and then, as the violet eyes became by degrees lighted with great joy and the sweet lips melted to a smile of ineffable rapture, clasped both hands together just beneath her cheek in an attitude of girlish and innocent delight.

So she stood until the fervour of Rowan's words and voice and eyes rose to an ecstasy of passion, and then leaning forward her head, not indeed to hide the sweet blushes which were rising to her cheeks, but as a child eager to rush to a beloved embrace, and her eyes answering the ardour she read in those she gazed into, she half stretched forth her arms as if her longing to twine him in a caress were but restrained by maiden bashfulness. Rowan saw the gesture, stepped forward, opened wide his arms, and the girl Madonna rushed to his embrace, nestling her blushing face upon his neck, as in a rapture of fondness he clasped her to his bosom.

At the same moment a terrible cry rang through the room and through the house, waking the *tsiganes*, who sprang from their beds in mad terror, and startling the stupid Moldavians, who, despairing of really frightening Rowan, had decided on merely making him look a fool, and were at that very moment creeping up the staircase, dressed in absurd costumes and armed with monster squirts and all kinds of grotesque instruments—the cry of a strong man in an agony of terror. The horrified Adams saw his master hurl the woman from him with great violence,

snatch his revolver from his pocket, discharge three chambers of it at her in quick succession, and then reel and fall forward on his face, while she, rising from the floor apparently unhurt, glided from the apartment by the still open door. When Adams reached his master's side he found him quite dead, the body presenting two most remarkable peculiarities: first a very strong odour of musk—and secondly, on the neck three small wounds shaped like three X's joined together. The medical man, a German, who was immediately called in, ascribed the death of Colonel Rowan to aneurism of the heart, and declined to attach the least importance to the three small wounds or bites on the neck, the post-mortem examination proving that so far as the cause of death was concerned the physician was right in his conjecture.

As for the strange lady with the Madonna face, Adams was far too shrewd a man of the world to make known the extraordinary circumstance to every one. He told Tony Jeratzesco, and inquiries were made; but no such person had been seen or heard of, and so the matter dropped; and it is only within the last few months that Mr. Adams, now retired from his delicate and difficult profession of valet and living in the neighbourhood of Newmarket, could be prevailed upon to give a detailed account of all the strange facts connected with the death of his master, show Hippy Rowan's diary, and complete his story by producing a photograph which he himself had taken of the dead man's neck, on which is plainly visible the imprint of the Kiss of Judas.



X. L.